

# COUNTERING EXTREMISM; BEYOND INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

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USAWC CIVILIAN RESEARCH PROJECT

**COUNTERING EXTREMISM;  
BEYOND INTERAGENCY COOPERATION**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Extremism is a clear threat to the security of the United States and its allies. Assistance and development programs can potentially counter extremist messaging and subsequently the recruiting efforts of violent extremists. It may be most useful to view violent extremism through the prism of counterinsurgency. Department of Defense counterinsurgency doctrine, experience and assets can substantively assist in this effort. This paper suggests that in order to enhance effectiveness, the United States Government should systemically integrate all entities into cohesive, holistic assistance and development programs which can undermine worldwide extremism. This paper examines efforts in Yemen, Lebanon and Mauritania to help identify methods that may be more widely applicable.





## COUNTERING EXTREMISM; BEYOND INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

Extremism, especially violent extremism, is a clear threat to the national security of the United States. It is widely believed that effectively addressing quality of life issues, encouraging peaceful conflict resolution and enhancing political inclusion are critical to neutralizing extremist messaging, helping prevent the development and spread of violent extremism. The goal of this work is to highlight transferable approaches that can improve DOS/USAID/DOD efforts at forging more effective integrated programs for countering extremism through development, and the assets DOD can bring to bear. Traditionally, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The United States Department of State (DOS) are the primary agencies for development, with the Department of Defense (DOD) efforts in support. But traditional “interagency cooperation” has often not resulted in effective programs. The U.S. Government (USG) should maximize integration of effort, bringing all elements together from inception to planning and assessment, of a coherent plan. DOD assets, from doctrine to personnel and funding, can be of great benefit in helping create and execute those integrated efforts. Programs in each country vary based on the specific situation. Issues including available assets, clarity of U.S. policy goals, and the nature of the bi-lateral relationship will impact the direction and effectiveness of any programs. While systemic deficiencies in the National Security System hinder effective integration, this work will focus on efforts at the Country Team level in Yemen, Lebanon, and Mauritania. Another goal will be to discuss the comparative advantages that DOD has to offer in order to help illuminate how those resources and expertise can best be brought to bear.

States which cannot address the basic needs and aspirations of their people can foster political and social “space” where extremist messaging is more likely to find an accepting audience. Improving the effectiveness of stability, development, and assistance efforts can enhance U.S. national security by addressing the drivers of instability and poverty, which create fertile territory for extremism and radicalization. Ms. Henrietta Fore, while acting head of USAID noted, “Foreign assistance is a mainstream commitment of the U.S. Government, and development is a critical pillar of our National Security Strategy. There is no doubt that helping developing nations become peaceful, stable and economically self-sufficient is in the best interest of our Nation’s security.”<sup>1</sup> Five of the seven Strategic Goals for DOS and USAID are clearly aligned with missions that DOD has also identified as critical to defeating extremism.<sup>2</sup> The current U.S. Army Posture Statement codifies a commitment to development and stability operations as critical to U.S. security.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henrietta Fore, Acting USAID Administrator and Acting Director of Foreign Assistance Department of State / USAID Strategic Plan 2007-2012, Revised in May 2007.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, *Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2007-2012: Transformational Diplomacy*. Washington, DC, May 2007, 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Director of the Army Staff Executive Strategy Group, *2011 Army Posture Statement*, March 1, 2011.

DOS, DOD and USAID have all identified the need for greater interagency cooperation to enhance Homeland Security. That desire is also clearly incorporated in the current National Security Strategy (NSS). While the NSS recognizes the need for a whole of government approach, it continues to instruct agencies to simply coordinate their various missions rather than require fully integrated planning and execution.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, by segregating our whole of government approach, effectiveness continues to be less than optimal. Consequently, integrated USG efforts are often primarily the result of individuals on the ground who “make it happen” rather than from systemic approaches focused on mission requirements vice agencies.

In December of 2005 the National Security Council published a directive outlining goals, roles and responsibilities for the planning and execution of reconstruction and stabilization. The document also identified State Department’s Office of Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) as the lead agency for those efforts. Unfortunately, as noted in the Project for National Security Reform, “neither a lead organization nor a lead individual has the de jure or de facto authority to command independent departments and agencies. The *lead* agency approach thus usually means in practice a *sole* agency approach.”<sup>5</sup> This is due in large part to lack of actual authorities vested in the lead organization. So while S/CRS is charged with ensuring coordination among all agencies, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) is charged with coordinating its activities, there is no statutory mechanism to ensure integrated efforts. Additionally S/CRS is not sufficiently staffed to plan for and execute these worldwide operations on its own. As of this writing, the focus of effort for the element is reacting to only the highest priority requests for mobile reconstruction teams. To date, it remains unclear whether the organization will take primacy for developing the guiding policies and priorities of effort necessary for a worldwide mission.

The current agency-focused structure of the USG is not yet empowered nor does it have sufficient incentive to execute comprehensive institutional reforms comparable to those enacted for the DOD through the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. This act worked to ensure joint planning and operations among the various military service components in part by changing the force structure and professional educational system of the armed forces to support that transformation.<sup>6</sup> Within both State Department and USAID we are beginning to see some of the institutional and educational restructuring needed to coerce changes in organizational and individual behavior. This feature was a hallmark of the Goldwater Nichols Act. Previous to Goldwater-Nichols, military officers felt that “joint” positions were a distraction and likely damaging to their career progression. By contrast, military officers now must have joint duty assignments to be considered competitive for promotion to most senior ranks. Currently both

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<sup>4</sup> President Barak Obama, from *The National Security Strategy*, Washington DC, May 2010, p. 11 and p.16.

<sup>5</sup> The Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield*, Washington, DC, 2008, p. vii.

<sup>6</sup> *The Goldwater Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, as cited in website of The National Defense University, <http://www.ndu.edu/library/goldnich/goldnich.html>

USAID and State Department have started to require assignment across the interagency for their most senior personnel. While that initiative is only beginning to take hold, it should help produce officers who are more comfortable with planning and executing operations that are more significantly integrated than through traditional interagency cooperation.

USAID has demonstrated its desire to address some of these impediments to integration in its recently published policy concerning Civil-Military Cooperation. This policy recognizes the expertise and even funding that DOD can bring to bear, noting that USAID retains primacy for overall USG assistance, development and stabilization efforts. The policy states that USAID will place senior officials at key military headquarters to help ensure that DOD efforts are part of a coherent, whole of government approach to these issues.<sup>7</sup> USAID efforts at the Country Team level in Yemen can be seen as an early example of the positive benefits of this policy. Indeed the former Mission Director for USAID in Yemen, Dr. Jeffrey Ashley, has worked closely with DOD on numerous occasions previous to this posting, most recently in Iraq. From those experiences Dr. Ashley created a development/stability program that fully integrates all agencies of the USG in a continuous planning, execution, and assessment cycle. A number of other USAID officers and representatives from the Office of Transition Initiatives have also previously worked closely alongside their DOD counterparts. That familiarity has helped foster the integrated efforts currently underway.

As noted, integrated efforts across the USG in these types of missions have primarily depended on the drive of individuals on the ground, such as Dr. Ashley, rather than systemic processes. Without comprehensive governmental reform as envisioned in the Project for National Security Reform, sustained institutional changes are unlikely. The specifics of that reform project are well beyond the scope of this work. A reading of the project makes it clear that widespread institutional restructuring of the USG security apparatus will be necessary to effectively bring all elements of national power to bear against the wide variety of complex threats facing the U.S. As noted by the drafters of the PNSR, the current national security bureaucracy was created to deal with threats from other nation-states. Today we face a variety of more ambiguous dangers, such as Islamist extremism, which often emanate from the shortcomings of weak, under-governed, or failing states. These new threats need to be addressed in anticipation of their coming to fruition.<sup>8</sup> In short, our actions need to be more proactive rather than reactive. The October 2010 passage of the Skelton-Davis Interagency National Security Professional Education, Administration, and Development System Act took an initial positive step toward more integrated government processes for national security. The Act focuses on fostering the creation of a cadre of national security professionals. To do this, the Act establishes, among other things, educational opportunities through a consortium

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<sup>7</sup> *Civilian-Military Cooperation Policy*, USAID, Washington, DC, July 2008

<sup>8</sup> Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield*, Washington, DC November 2008, p. ii.

of national security educational institutions, incentives for agencies to support interagency training/implementation, and requirements for agencies to maintain operational staffing while supporting the education and training program.<sup>9</sup> This Act should help professionally foster those personnel who are interested and trained to excel in an interagency environment, but the agency-focused nature of the national security structure will likely continue to hinder optimum implementation of this reform.

#### Differing Views of Extremism:

There may be utility in modifying how one views current extremists, their ideology, and networks. Specifically, some have advanced the concept of addressing modern Muslim extremism, at least partially, along the lines of counterinsurgency, rather than as a primarily counterterrorism issue. Although violent extremism is a more direct, tangible threat in the immediate term, extremism can sustain the arguments and ideas that can be modified to justify violence. Recently, a founder of the Quilliam Institute used the example of racism in the U.S. His argument is that explicitly non-violent racists sustained a mind-set of hatred and exclusion that helped fuel the violent manifestations of racism.<sup>10</sup>

It can be misleading to view this struggle from any one paradigm. In a recent work, David Kilcullen discussed four different possible ways to view ongoing global extremism; a backlash to Globalization, a Global Insurgency, a Civil War inside Islam, and Asymmetric Warfare. These views are each best described as possible aspects of the situation since the issues and their solutions intersect and cut across all four concepts. They are by no means mutually exclusive scenarios.<sup>11</sup> But it is the prism of counterinsurgency that may provide the most promise for success against global extremism, primarily because of the premium on non-kinetic and even non-military aspects as the keys to success.

The use of all available elements of “soft power” has been a pillar of counterinsurgency doctrine for decades. In the post-9/11 era the significance of nullifying extremist rhetoric has become more clearly a matter of U.S. national security. DOD has consequently become more and more involved in widespread assistance, development and conflict resolution efforts, mostly under the rubric of stability operations. Fully integrated planning and execution of these operations is critical for mission success. Greater integration across the various USG agencies will decrease duplication, ensure unity of effort, clarify priorities, and make the best use of resources.

The most prominent proponent of violent Islamist extremism worldwide, Al-Qaida, can clearly be viewed as “an organized movement aimed at the

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<sup>9</sup> Skelton, *Davis Introduce Groundbreaking Interagency Reform Legislation*, Small Wars Journal, October 2, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Maajid Nawaz, discussion forum at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, DC, 5 January 2010.

<sup>11</sup> *The Accidental Guerrilla*, David Kilcullen, Kindle Edition, Sections January 2010.

overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict”<sup>12</sup> A letter reportedly from Al-Qaida second in command Ayman Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is potentially very illuminating. At the time, July 2005, Zarqawi was the most prominent leader of the insurgency in Iraq. Zawahiri made it clear that while Zarqawi was a dedicated jihadist, some of his methods were actually inhibiting Al-Qaida from attaining one of its primary short-term goals, the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in the heart of the Middle East. Zawahiri continued on to identify the overturning of the current, predominantly secular, world political order in favor of a worldwide Caliphate as a long-term goal for the organization. So certainly Al-Qaida’s leadership would self describe the movement as a global insurgency.<sup>13</sup>

Counterinsurgency emphasizes the use of non-military and non-kinetic means to attain results. While tightly focused military action is usually necessary and increasing the security felt by the population is critical, use of all other “soft power” assets are considered the priority of effort. Indeed, effective counterinsurgency is at heart a socio-political mission, applying those means which are most likely have positive results among the population. Additionally, counterinsurgency is dynamic. There is no single script. The strategy recognizes the need to tailor the approach for the circumstances and highlights the need to constantly monitor, assess and adjust as necessary. Consequently, maximum integration of effort across State Department, USAID and the Department of Defense is essential to create and execute an agile and successful program. The paradigm of counterinsurgency can provide the holistic mind-set necessary to effectively address the complex challenges that give rise to violent extremism and radicalization.

## DOD Capabilities

The Department of Defense has assets and capabilities that can and have effectively implemented aspects of USG soft power for these types of asymmetric missions. On the budgeting-side, the DOD has in the past transferred a significant amount of funding under 1207 authorization for use in State Department and USAID development and assistance programs.

Section 1207 authority has been used to fund activities of the State Department’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS, established in 2004) and activities implemented by other agencies that are coordinated by S/CRS, including activities of USAID. These funds have supported activities in 14 countries and in two regions. According to a United States Institute of Peace (USIP) report, Section 1207 was introduced “in response to requests from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to help jump start S/CRS by providing authorization and funding for projects that would involve interagency coordination. This action was taken in recognition of the fact that Congress

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<sup>12</sup> Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington DC., amended September 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Ayman Al-Zawahiri, letter from Ayman Al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, Afghanistan, July 2005, English translation, p. 2.

was unable to pass a State Department authorization bill that would authorize S/CRS to conduct a comparable program<sup>14</sup> and “because of the perception that it was easier to obtain funding from Congress” in the DOD bill rather than the State Department bill.<sup>14</sup>

The temporary nature of 1207 funding was reinforced in subsequent products as the goal is to allocate sufficient funding for State Department’s Complex Crises Fund.

The Joint Staff recognizes the importance of civil-military operations and the need to ensure those operations are synchronized with all elements of the USG. To that end Joint Publication 3-57.1 provides U.S. military doctrine on how to plan and execute “Civil-Military Operations”. Closely coordinated, durable assistance and development programs are crucial to the successful struggle against violent extremism.

At the strategic, operational and tactical levels and across the full range of military operations, civil-military operations (CMO) are a primary military instrument to synchronize military and nonmilitary instruments of national power, particularly in support of stability, counterinsurgency and other operations, dealing with asymmetric and irregular threats.<sup>15</sup>

The term “stability operations” deserves particular mention. The DOD defines stability operations as a broad set of missions and tasks, “to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.”<sup>16</sup> The cooperative efforts between the DOD, State Department and USAID discussed in this work can all be seen as element of “stability operations”. The mission is broadly defined, leaving personnel on the ground to determine what activities are appropriate for the challenges in a particular country or region. Recent experiences indicate that integrated, mutually supportive efforts in this field are crucial. Any kinetic military operation should be targeted to support plans for the delivery of assistance by USAID and sustained security, preferably by Host Nation forces. Non-kinetic, stability or reconstruction-type missions should also be planned to substantively support other non-military efforts. It is crucial therefore that USAID and DOD integrate their efforts so that the USG can turn short term military and security gains into more durable, self-sustaining development. Later in this work, an operation in Marib, Yemen will highlight and example of such cooperation.

## Special Operations, Best Suited

Special Operations Forces, under the purview of The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), have specially trained elements,

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<sup>14</sup> Nina M. Serafino, *U.S. Department of Defense, Section 1207 Security and Stabilization Assistance: Background and Congressional Concerns*, Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, June 3 2009, p.1

<sup>15</sup> U.S Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-57, Civil Military Operations*, Washington, DC, July 2008., p. vii.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *DOD Directive 3000.07, Irregular Warfare*, Washington, DC, December 2008, p.11.

such as Military Information and Support Teams (MIST) and Civil-Military Support Elements (CMSE), which can provide skills that are instrumental for effective reconstruction and stabilization missions. Additionally, many conventional forces recently deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan have on the ground experience in grappling with the application of soft power while conducting stability operations. One must be cautious of applying direct lessons from operations in the combat theaters. But those experiences can be valuable if properly modified for missions in other, less immediately hostile, environments. A primary goal should be improving the political/social/economic situation sufficiently to reduce the need for kinetic operations.

While the U.S. Military in general does have assets to execute stability-type operations, a hallmark of Special Operations is working with and teaching Host Nation military and security forces. This training effort can range from kinetic to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Host Nation personnel, both military and civilian, should, whenever possible, be in the lead. The more that Host Nation forces deliver needed goods and services to the population, the better the relationship with the population. A more positive relationship can foster trust between the population and the military/security apparatus, helping make an area safer and less vulnerable to extremist messaging and/or recruitment. This more positive image of the government in general, and security forces in particular, can also positively encourage the population to work with the government against extremists.

Information activities are a crucial element in unconventional and/or asymmetric warfare. A Military Information Support Team (MIST) is a small element that is specifically designed and trained to support US Embassy information efforts. These teams are expected to work directly with an Embassy Public Diplomacy section. Their operations are fully synchronized with embassy goals and objectives as directed by the Ambassador, who retains approval authority over their efforts. Personnel are trained to work with a wide variety of media and can bring their own funding. That additional money and expertise can be of significant benefit to the Ambassador and Country Team, providing effective messaging for critical missions such as counter-radicalization, anti-smuggling, and support for building capable and accountable Host Nation governmental institutions.<sup>17</sup>

Another unique element is the Civil-Military Support Element (CMSE) which “assesses partner nation capacities, to develop and sustain government and local institutions, including infrastructure development, that address the population’s basic humanitarian needs.”<sup>18</sup> The capabilities of both these elements, and special operations personnel trained in unconventional operations, can be valuable assets for creating a comprehensive program, which can in turn

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<sup>17</sup> *Military Information Support Team, U.S. Africa Command Fact Sheet*, AFRICOM website <http://www.africom.mil/fetchBinary.asp?pdfID=20100719122755>, Stuttgart, Germany, updated July 2010.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

undermine extremist messaging. These programs can include development and educational programs to improve individual well-being and enhance political inclusion, two areas of concern for many unstable or under-governed states.

The National Security Council (NSC) is tasked with forming, coordinating and disseminating national policy and goals for the interagency community. A unified policy with prioritized goals is vital to creating an integrated effort. Without a clear priority of effort, the various elements are left to determine their own goals and priorities. An approved overarching strategy, as we have for Yemen, can be critical for creating a coherent plan of action. In the most recent Mission Strategic and Resource Plan, the Chief of Mission notes that the Country Team in Yemen will act as a laboratory for creating whole of government approaches for the wide variety of problems facing the country. Most importantly, the Ambassador detailed common USG goals for Yemen with the following statement.

The long-term vision for Yemen is a nation at peace with itself, able to provide basic services and economic opportunity to its citizens so that the multiple, competing centers of gravity (tribes, opposition political parties, regional players) begin to see their interests served by an inclusive political process, and terrorist organizations no longer find an environment receptive to intolerance and violence. This environment will contribute materially to the achievement of our priorities in Yemen: prevent attacks on America's homeland, its citizens or economic interests abroad, as well as attacks on our allies.<sup>19</sup>

### Countering Extremism in Yemen; Comprehensive and Integrated, Not Just Cooperative.

Yemen is in a chronic state of decline. Most sectors from internal politics, security and the economy are on a downward trend, and have been for a number of years. Consequently it is difficult to determine just where to start "stabilization operations". Generally, the priority for such operations would be to assist USAID in its mid to long-term goals of increasing the population's overall living standard and sense of political inclusion. But recent high-profile operations by Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) sharpened the immediate focus of U.S. goals. Two events specifically highlighted the reach of AQAP outside of Yemen; the August 2009 attempted assassination of Prince Mohammad Bin-Nayif, head of counterterrorism for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the failed suicide bombing of Northwest Airlines flight 253, in December of 2009. While those attacks sharpened focus on the need for direct action against AQAP in the short term, there was realization both in the Country Team and in Washington DC that the complexity of the situation required a more holistic, integrated approach to effectively address the challenges of AQAP's extremist messaging and recruiting efforts.

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<sup>19</sup> FY 2012 Mission Strategic and Resource Plan U.S. Mission to Yemen, US Embassy, Sana'a, Yemen, p.2



The Country Team in Sana'a, Yemen was able to use the common goals and strategy from the official national policy to guide its efforts. USAID initiated the new integrated development and assistance program by trying to identify the primary drivers of instability and poverty. Endemic socio-economic problems create an environment of hopelessness that extremists can, and have, exploited. All DOD elements with representatives in country; The Office of Military Cooperation, Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) personnel, and the Defense Attaché Office (DAO) participated in the process from its inception. The interagency group identified the following as likely primary drivers of instability and conflict; large youth bulge and rapidly growing population, growing natural resource scarcity, lack of economic opportunities, declining government revenues, corruption, limited state presence, violent Islamist extremism, unequal development and marginalized political representation. The group then began an analysis of where USG programs could have the most impact with regards to both benefit to the population and ability to forward USG policy in the country.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the interagency group also studied the areas in question with regard to the ability of the USG to effectively deliver goods or services on the ground. Again, input from the U.S. military elements helped provide a more complete picture of the overall security situation and the accessibility of various areas. The military elements also targeted their training plans with the Yemeni military to compliment the overall stability and development efforts. For example, as previously noted, personnel from SOCCENT provided training, advice and assistance to facilitate the Yemeni Special Operations Forces (YSOF) in their delivery of medical assistance to Marib province.<sup>21</sup> Not only was this a first for the YSOF, but the area in question had been identified as a priority of effort through the synchronization process in order to enhance USAID development in the area. Recognizing the importance of integrated missions, USAID also worked diligently to marry-up their Office of Transition Initiatives with SOCCENT. This joint effort will assist in setting the stage for the Community Livelihoods and Responsive Governance initiative, which will actively address a number of the key drivers of instability and violence.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout this process, DOD representatives provided their perspectives on issues ranging from tribal dynamics to the quality of the U.S. military relationship with Host Nation forces in the areas being considered. USAID was able to benefit from insights gathered by DOD personnel during their training efforts in various locations around the country. Personnel from the CMSE provided information on the types of assistance and assets they could deliver as well as delivery timelines. The SOCCENT and OMC representatives were able to also mold future security assistance training efforts, either Mobile Training Teams (MTT) or Joint-Combined Expeditionary Training Teams (JCETT) into the

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<sup>20</sup> "Overview of USAID/Yemen Country Strategy 2010-2012, From Director USAID, Sana'a Yemen, September 2010.

<sup>21</sup> From personal interviews at CENTCOM and SOCOM, December 2010.

<sup>22</sup> "Transition Initiatives, USAID Yemen", June 2010.

overall fabric of the development and assistance plan. The USAID Chief was then able create a holistic multi-faceted, interagency program designed to both meet the needs of the Host Nation population while advancing USG policy interests.

This group meets weekly or bi-weekly with all the various USG stakeholders in order to share information about developments, introduce new plans and report on progress, whether positive or negative. The various USG agencies then discuss how to best fund, staff and monitor plans in order to determine how well those plans meet the goals outlined in the US National Strategy for Yemen. Elements from Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) habitually detail what assets DOD can bring to positively impact either the programs themselves, or the neighborhood in which a program is to be executed. These offerings range from traditional Medical or Veterinary Civic Action Programs (MEDCAP or VETCAP), to training local security forces or support for community programs as noted above.

#### Lebanon: A Struggle for Legitimacy

Each of the situations in this study is unique, with Lebanon being no exception. Internal challenges by extremists against weak or poorly governed states are widespread. Boaz Atizili notes the following;

...failed and weak states provide a friendly environment to such actors... because the state cannot resist external attempts to use such organizations as proxies; because the high level of internal violence that is associated with failed states creates demand for armed allies; because a low level of state legitimacy allows for easy recruitment to the violent non-state actors; and because the lack of states services and institutions allows the organizations to operate as "surrogate states" thus gaining the needed legitimacy to their violent goal.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately Lebanon has, since inception, faced numerous challenges to forming a unified central authority. The State of Lebanon was created by the French in September of 1920. The French had taken responsibility for the area as part of the San Remo agreement with Britain at the end of World War I. The Maronite community, specifically, pressed energetically for the creation of a "Greater Lebanon", separate from the lands of the Syrian Mandate. While the Maronites dominated the smaller Mount Lebanon region, they could only hope to constitute a bare majority in the boundaries of their proposed new State. The area to be known as the country of Lebanon had been intrinsically linked to the lands east and had not been a distinct, separate political entity in the known past. Consequently, not all of the proposed citizens of the new state held the same

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<sup>23</sup> Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, "State Weakness and Vacuum of Power in Lebanon" by Boaz Atzili, Taylor and Francis Group LLC, July 13, 2010., p. 760

level of desire for a separate polity as the Maronites.<sup>24</sup> The confessional structure of the GOL nearly guarantees fractious and ineffective governments. Seemingly every government post is associated to one confession or another, from top political/military leadership to ministerial and departmental positions. While designed to address the concerns of all the primary interest groups, in practice it has ensured perpetual paralysis and lack of effectiveness. Worse, officials become representatives of their confession rather than national-level leaders.

Consequently the Government of Lebanon (GOL) continues to be a “weak state”, both institutionally and with regards to legitimacy. Institutionally, the GOL has historically not provided basic goods and services normally associated with a central government, at least not to all regions. For a variety of reasons, some out of the control of the government, services have been particularly lacking in Shia dominated areas of the Bekaa Valley and South of the Litani River. Precisely because of the confessional makeup of the GOL, its leaders have been primarily seen as representatives for that particular sect rather than for the nation as a whole. The lack of effective taxation has also contributed to the inability of the central government to fund complete, nationwide government services. Hizballah has, in the last 30 years, effectively turned this lack of GOL legitimacy to its advantage. It has been highly effective at creating that “surrogate state”, especially in the Shia-dominated parts of the country, providing services such as health care, education and welfare for its constituents.

Hizballah also garnered credit in Lebanon for forcing Israel to withdraw in March of 2000, increasing its popular support and sense of legitimacy among Lebanese. In July of 2006 Hizballah demonstrated its continued willingness to conduct independent military operations across international borders, initiating the 2006 war with Israel. In May of 2008 Hizballah initiated open domestic hostilities in Beirut in reaction to GOL moves against the pro-Hizballah chief of airport security and against the organization’s private communications network. With that turmoil in everyone’s minds, in 2009 Hizballah was able to leverage for veto authority over the newly elected government, led by Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Hizballah has positioned itself as a surrogate for both government hard and soft power, exacerbating a highly volatile situation and threatening the ability of Lebanon to function as an independent State.

While Hizballah is a prominent force in Lebanon, the U.S. Government will not coordinate directly with its members due to its past terrorist activities and continued threats to peace and stability in the region. The belief is that to work with members of Hizballah would serve only to strengthen the organization’s grip on Lebanese society rather than bolster the GOL. Hizballah’s recent activities, collapsing the Hariri-led government and emplacing a pro-Syria/Hizballah Prime Minister, will likely make the official relationship with the GOL significantly more difficult.

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<sup>24</sup> “A House of Many Mansions – The History of Lebanon Reconsidered”, Kamal Salibi, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1993, pp. 19-37.

The Chief of Mission Statement in the current Mission Strategic and Resource Plan (MSRP) for U.S. Embassy Beirut identifies four primary desired outcomes, in priority.

1. *Lebanese state institutions to exert sovereign authority throughout Lebanese territory, thereby ensuring the security of the borders and maintaining internal security.*
2. *A Lebanese state whose institutions undermine the appeal of extremism as Lebanon eradicates terrorist safe havens in Palestinian camps and partners in international counter-terrorism initiatives.*
3. *A Lebanon that is viable as an independent and sovereign democracy capable of responding to the needs of its citizens*
4. *A Lebanese state that provides effective services to its citizens and promotes economic prosperity across sectarian lines<sup>25</sup>*

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is one element of the GOL that has managed to create and retain a positive national image for itself. It is popular across confessional lines, even through the political turmoil in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri in 2005, the Israeli-Hizballah War of 2006, and the current change of Prime Ministers. Indeed it appears to be practically the only official arm of the GOL that garners widespread support and legitimacy. Consequently the LAF is uniquely positioned to positively effect the Lebanese political and social environment while addressing issues of concern to the United States and the International Community.

Immediately after the end of the 2005 war between Israel and Hizballah, the LAF moved to occupy positions south of the Litani river, all the way to the border with Israel. This was a significant accomplishment for the LAF and one that positioned it to fulfill its stated mission of defending Lebanon. Although Hizballah no longer openly patrols southern Lebanon, it is clear that their operatives continue to have complete freedom of movement. In July of 2010 The LAF and the Israeli Defense Forces clashed while the Israelis were clearing brush form in front of the technical fence, which is on the Israeli side of the border. There was an exchange of fire and lives lost on both sides, but Hizballah did not participate nor were there any reports of its para-military forces in the area during the clash. Although a dangerous situation, the LAF, at least publically, touted this as an example of their ability to defend the border with Israel.

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Mission to Lebanon, FY 2012 Mission Strategic and Resource Plan, Sana'a, Yemen, May 2010, pp. 1-2.

In addition to its military and security roles, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) officially embraces two non-kinetic roles; “Engaging in social and development activities according to national interests. Undertaking relief operations in coordination with other public and humanitarian institutions.”<sup>26</sup> Both of these missions can help further increase the popularity and influence of the LAF, while positively advancing U.S. policy goals identified by the Chief of Mission. It is in this area that the U.S. has at least some opportunities for greater, more positive engagement with the LAF that may translate to increased legitimacy for the GOL. The Embassy, through the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) is working to enhance their relationship in these, humanitarian-focused, missions.

There is a relatively limited ongoing project to train LAF personnel in Humanitarian Assistance and Civil-Affairs. Small teams visit periodically and stay for approximately two weeks at a time. These teams intend to provide training for a broad swath of the LAF. The goal is to help the LAF be more effective at conducting civil-military assistance projects and providing humanitarian relief, especially in parts of the country where the GOL has not traditionally done so. Additionally, the ODC is working to help identify projects where the LAF can help a number of underdeveloped areas in the country. As of January 2011, the Ambassador has also authorized a MIST to make periodic visits to work directly with the embassy Public Diplomacy office. Information operations will be critical to enhancing the impact of all USG projects in Lebanon, especially given the sophisticated political environment. Currently these elements are also only able to come in on a periodic basis for limited periods of time.

U.S. military personnel have recently supported two Civil Affairs projects in the northern part of the country. In one, CENTCOM was able to rebuild a fire station that had been in a poor state of repair. CENTCOM elements are also working to rebuild a community school in Hemat, near the LAF base where LAF Special Operations Forces receive training. Both of these efforts help bolster the positive image of both the LAF and the U.S. military. These projects were both also the result of close coordination between the ODC and USAID offices.

Clearly there are many opportunities for expanding the footprint of the LAF through civil-affairs and humanitarian assistance operations. The ODC and USAID in Lebanon should look to work more closely together to determine how best to create mutually supporting, integrated programs. It is difficult to predict the future path of USG assistance, whether civilian or military, especially with the recent collapse of the Hariri government. If, as expected, the Hizballah-backed government of Prime Minister Mikati follows destabilizing policies, military assistance will decrease significantly or even stop, especially for lethal assistance or purely military equipment. Non-lethal, civil-military oriented assistance may be a productive way to remain engaged with the LAF and

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<sup>26</sup> Lebanese Armed Forces Website, English version, Beirut Lebanon, January 2011.

enhance the USG image with the local population, even if we have a troubled relationship with the GOL as a whole.

#### MAURITANIA: Moving forward...but fragile

Mauritania has suffered from a highly volatile political environment over the last two decades. Racial divisions, internal power struggles, and the question of the Western Sahara have all played a significant role in destabilization. There have been at least six attempted coups since independence in 1960, two of which were successful. From 1992 until 2005 Maayouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya dominated the political scene. He was ousted from power in August 2005 by Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall and Colonel Ould Abdel Aziz. After free presidential elections in March 2007, President Ould Cheikh Abdallahi was inaugurated in April 2007. That presidency was also short-lived. General Abdel Aziz seized power in August 2008 and eventually elected president in July 2009.<sup>27</sup>

The USG has for the last decade addressed extremism in Mauritania as part of a regional approach. European Command, at the direction of DOS, started the Trans-Sahel Initiative in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. That initial program focused on improving the military counterterrorism and border control capabilities in Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad. Special Operations elements out of European Command provided the primary trainers for this military/security focused initiative. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) grew out of PSI.<sup>28</sup> DOS constructed TSCTI to provide a more comprehensive approach to countering terrorism.

TSCTI would look beyond the provision of training and equipment for counter-terrorism units, but also would consider development assistance, expanded public diplomacy campaigns and other elements as part of an overall CT strategy<sup>29</sup>

By 2006 DOS renamed the program a Partnership instead of Initiative. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) was activated in October 2007. It now has responsibility for the continent, minus Egypt, previously split between EUCOM and Central Command. AFRICOM has a partner program to TSCTI named Operation Enduring Freedom Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS). This program provides the more traditional military, CT focused participation for the TSCTP as well as military-sponsored "soft" CT programs. In all, TSCTP seeks to fuse all elements of the USG into a coherent program. As with Yemen, the TSCTP seeks to leverage a number of DOD elements including CMSE, MIST, regional

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<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Background Note: Mauritania*, Washington D.C., April 2010, p. 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Global Security online article, June 15, 2005, [www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/pan-sahel.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/pan-sahel.htm)

<sup>29</sup> *CRS Report for Congress, Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa*, May 16, 2007, p. 18.

exchanges, Joint Planning Advisory Teams, Humanitarian Assistance Programs, and Joint Combined Exchange Training Teams.<sup>30</sup> Mauritania faces significant challenges, which are complicated by the continued presence of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM). Both the civilian and military components of the USG recognize the challenges and appear to be working very closely together to forge mutually supportive programs to improve the lives of Mauritians while making extremist messaging less effective.

### Necessity is the Mother of All Cooperation

Recent U.S. bi-lateral engagement has been uneven precisely because of the volatile political situation in Mauritania. The USG as a whole is re-forming policy goals given the new democratically elected government. The Embassy is working to determine the best path for engaging the government of Mauritania in order to improve the internal situation while addressing key U.S. interests in the region. The Government of Mauritania is apparently very wary of program proposals being brought to them from the outside, complicating efforts to address these issues in a timely manner.

The Embassy is facing a large turnover of personnel, which affords the opportunity to set a new agenda. Unlike with Yemen or Lebanon, there do not appear to be clear, overarching U.S. national or strategic interests at stake to help crystallize policy thinking. This makes it difficult for the Embassy to effectively focus the efforts of USG representatives on the ground. Still, the Embassy has worked to emphasize a few major concepts.

U.S. programs in Mauritania have remained focused on three broad areas: security assistance against an increasingly robust Al Qaeda terrorist threat; efforts to meet basic humanitarian needs while fostering sustainable economic growth; and support for democratic development based on rule of law and respect for human rights.<sup>31</sup>

Recently, USG efforts have focused the military/security aspect of the equation, with the immediate term goals of basic capacity building and professionalization. Bi-weekly meetings between AFRICOM and the Country Team ensure that the DOS, USAID, and DOD efforts are fused into common USG-wide goals.

During this period a number of State Department and USAID programs have been delayed or interrupted by the political turmoil. All Embassy elements recognize the need to increase efforts on “soft CT” programs. The U.S. military has apparently been able to quickly re-engage with its Mauritanian counterparts, providing a platform for moving forward in the immediate term. The Defense

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<sup>30</sup> The U.S. Department of State, *USG efforts to counter terrorism in the Maghreb and Sahel; Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership*, Washington DC, PowerPoint Presentation

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Mission to Mauritania, *FY 2012 Mission Strategic and Resource Plan*, Nouakchott, Mauritania, p.1.

Attaché Office is working closely with the Ambassador and Country Team to determine where U.S. military elements may be best positioned to conduct development and assistance programs. AFRICOM has an active Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP). HAP teams have over the years been involved in conducting or supervising numerous DOD development and assistance projects. Teams have rotated in and out of country for 6-8 weeks at a time, providing a consistent source of additional expertise and funding.

The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) and the Ambassador determined that the HAP could be well placed to supervise a construction program endorsed by the previous Mauritanian government. The program involves the construction of vocational schools for youth who had dropped out of traditional schools. USAID had put together a plan to build the schools as requested by the Host Nation government. Disruption of bilateral relations following the most recent coup derailed implementation. It was decided to take advantage of the HAP to move the project forward, thus preventing further delay. The Mauritanian government would apparently like to replicate this program in other areas in order to assist at-risk youth.<sup>32</sup>

Currently, the threat from extremism in Mauritania appears to be at a lower level relative to either Yemen or Lebanon. Islam in Mauritania does not appear to be readily amenable to extremist messaging. The Embassy does recognize that continued instability, lack of economic opportunity and political exclusion can make various elements of Mauritanian society more susceptible to extremist messaging as time passes. A recent USAID study identified five key areas to target efforts; Zouerate, F'Derek, Nouakchot, Boutilimit and Nema. Within these areas USAID recommended programs to integrate youth, strengthen moderate Islamic voices, improve local community planning and strengthening media outreach.<sup>33</sup>

There seems to be general concurrence from within both the DOS and DOD that continued close cooperation, with integrated planning and execution, are necessary to achieve sustained positive results in Mauritania. As a result of constant interaction at the Country Team and regional level, DOS was able to rely on available DOD assets to ensure continuity of effort during a period of fluctuation in bilateral diplomatic relations.

#### Where to From Here:

USG personnel in each of these countries are working toward the goal of countering extremism, in order to prevent the development and spread of violent extremism. While USAID remains the primary coordinator, DOD has, to a greater or lesser extent, demonstrated where it can provide expertise or resources for development and humanitarian assistance efforts. As we have

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<sup>32</sup> Personal interviews at Department of State, Washington, D.C., February 2011.

<sup>33</sup> USAID Africa Bureau, *USAID Update, CVE Study and Program Applications*, June 2010.



seen, the depth of that DOD involvement and the quality of integrated efforts, have to date primarily been a function of the personalities on the ground. The absence of critical USG interests does not prevent cooperative action, but clear national policy goals can help effectively focus everyone's efforts. Unfortunately, traditional interagency cooperation has a mixed history of effectiveness. Too often it becomes a matter of de-confliction rather than a mutually supportive, coherent program. In order to be effective, the USG should ensure truly integrated effort by creating an inclusive, continuous planning, execution and evaluation cycle. Meanwhile, the USG needs to continue moving toward systemic change in how it approaches national security threats such as that from violent extremism.

